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ABSTRACT

The premise of this paper is that the state of educational sociology in New Zealand is uncertain. The following reasons are given: (1) The tradition of sociology is underdeveloped in New Zealand: (2) The community of scholars is scattered and divided: (3) Not enough effort has gone into the development of graduate research and occupational opportunities: and (4) Scholars in universities are poorly supported. Using memberships in organizations, interest in and conduct of research, and active participation in the wider sociological community as indicators, it was found that 24 scholars are involved in the sociology of education in New Zealand. Also discussed are the lack of conferences, professional publications, and the dearth of research and analysis and theoretical debate. New theoretical developments and possible future areas of research are outlined, and the responsibility of universities as research sites is noted. (FG)

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# Research on the Sociology of Education in New Zealand

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Although certain intellectual achievements rely upon the individual and relatively isolated efforts of scholars, most researchers are heavily dependent upon participation in a community of scholars for support, challenge and encouragement. Such communities are important in shaping the boundaries of debate, giving legitimacy to various enquiries and methodologies and in providing political support in the allocation of resources to research and continuing enquiry. Any assessment of the state of a particular community of scholars is likely, therefore, to consider such matters as indicators of the health of that community. I am sorry to report that, by my assessment, the health of the sociology of education in New Zealand is, at best, uncertain.

## The Research Community in the Sociology of Education

It is reasonable to suppose, given the need for membership of a community of scholars that a certain 'critical mass' is necessary before a sufficient variety of debate, capable of articulating alternative views and supporting new initiatives can occur. While estimates of the size of the community of sociologists interested in education in New Zealand are difficult to form, it is clear that the group is small and scattered. If, for instance, the membership of the New Zealand Association for Research in Education is taken as an indicator, those members listing sociology of education as a major research interest number 23, some 10 percent of the total membership at October 1979.

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Healthy enough, perhaps, though only 17 are members of institutions devoted to supporting research as part of their responsibilities. If, alternatively, the 1978 Ministerial Conference on Education Research background document, *A Directory of Educational Research Workers* is taken as an index, some 23 out of 186 research workers, or some 12 percent, list a topic in the sociology of education as a major interest. They are, by the way, not completely identical with the group belonging to NZARE.

When actual conduct of, rather than interest in, research is taken as an index, the number falls to 17 projects out of some 400, or 4 percent of active research, including higher degree students (Pickens and Boswell, 1978a). It is hard on the basis of these figures to conclude otherwise than that the sociology of education holds a distinctly minor place within the educational research community in New Zealand. Moreover, when actual research activity is taken as the criterion, then substantially less educational research in New Zealand is informed by a sociological perspective than research based on either psychological, historical, curricular, linguistic, or philosophical analysis. This is especially true for research undertaken by graduate students as part of their M.A. or Ph.D. dissertations. Surely an ominous comment on the ability of this particular group of scholars to reproduce itself.

If membership of the Sociological Association of Australia and New Zealand is taken as an alternative index of active participation in a wider sociological community, some nine New Zealand members are listed as having interests in the sociology of education. Three attended the Annual Conference in 1979 and two presented papers, hardly a bold showing. Figures for the New Zealand Conference in 1979 are unavailable but it can be noted that the 1978 Conference collapsed for want of support, a situation unthinkable, for instance, for the New Zealand Psychological Society. The epistemological community of scholars involved in the sociology of education can be said, then, to consist of some two dozen people, roughly half of whom claim to be engaged in actual research, and a pitifully few graduate students swelling the body to slightly larger proportions. Of those actively engaged in research, over half are concentrated at two centres, Massey and Waikato Universities, with whom half of the remaining list also have close ties. One might expect, therefore, that these two universities would be centres of development of research in the sociology of education. The work at Waikato relies on four researchers, Ramsay, Mason, Sneddon and Battersby, while Massey has had, albeit for a brief time, a substantial group of sociologists; Adams, Bates, Chesson, Clark, Harker, Nash, Nolan and Wilson, who might just have achieved some kind of breakthrough but for the defections of Chesson, Bates

and Wilson, and the periodic absence of Adams. Other researchers are scattered in ones and twos throughout New Zealand in universities, teachers' colleges, government departments and schools. With no regular research conferences in either sociology or education, contact between researchers has been spasmodic and the opportunity to develop as a community rather than as individuals has been limited. The result has been a definite lack of conversation and debate between scholars who might have been expected to work towards the establishment of a sociology of New Zealand education.

Publication and Debate in the Sociology of Education

It is possible, of course, that New Zealand sociologists of education are sufficiently sturdy and independent to feel little need for intellectual companionship. It may be, for instance, that even without the benefit of community, they are able to research and publish prolifically. Let us consider the evidence.

The most immediately relevant avenue of publication is surely the *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*. An analysis of the 200 or so articles published by the Journal in the 13 years since its inception indicates some 9 or 10 papers informed by a sociological perspective, some 4 to 5 percent. Put another way, the sociologists have managed to produce, between them, roughly one scholarly paper every 17 months. Interestingly enough, the authors of four of the published papers are now working overseas.

In the 'alternative' journal *Delta*, over 12 years and some 160 articles, some 40 or 25 percent have been of a sociological bias. Many of them reflect the coursework content of sociology units at Massey University, and also, presumably, the bias of the editor.

Another index of information and support for sociological debate is the incidence of book reviews reporting and evaluating contributions to the field. In this respect, sociologists of education make little contribution to the *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*. In 13 years, and some 150 reviews, the Journal has reviewed four books that might be considered of direct relevance to sociologists of New Zealand education: Watson's (1964) book on intermediate schools, the Adams/Biddle (1970) study of classrooms, Mercurio's (1972) book on caning and the

Sydney group's book on adolescence (Connell *et al.*, 1975). Other more general volumes such as Webb and Collette's collection (1973), Forster's collection (1969), Pitts' volumes on class and ethnicity (1974, 1977) swell the number to eight and republication of Somerset's *Littledene* (1974) to nine. Important volumes such as Ramsay's *Family and Schooling in New Zealand* (1975) have been ignored, as has Calvert's *Role of the Pupil* (1975). In a wider context, not one of the books which have contributed to a revolution in the sociology of education in the past decade have been reviewed. Bernstein, Young, Whitty, Bernbaum, Bowles and Gintis, Braverman, Apple, Bourdieu are as completely absent from the pages of reviews as they are from the papers. One may perhaps be tempted to argue that this absence is because the editorial board of the Journal is composed of psychologists and philosophers and lacks the presence of a sociologist who could help inform editorial policy of what is going on in the sociology of education. On the other hand, it is an indictment of sociologists that they have done so little to ensure that the new sociology of education, and the radical theory and critical social analysis that has emerged so strongly in the northern hemisphere over the past decade is present in scholarly debate over education in New Zealand.

What Has Been Going On?

If the frequency of publication is low, what of the content? The diversity of preoccupation and the variety of theoretical allegiance are considerable. As far as the *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies* articles are concerned, Braithwaite (1967) was interested in education and the economy; Vellekoop (1968) in the migration plans and vocational aspirations of adolescents; Adams (1970) in teacher role; Elley and Irving (1972) in education and socio-economic status; Mercurio (1972) in educational rituals; McEwan and Tuck (1973) in the school/work transition; Campbell (1977) in school climate; Bates (1978) in general issues in the New Sociology of Education; and Ramsay (1979) in teacher socialisation. Several of these papers reflected or elaborated on work appearing in other forms. Vellekoop's (1970) work, for instance, was published by Canterbury University as *Vocational Choice in New Zealand*. Adams' work was part of a larger international project reported more fully in international journals such as the Symposium in *Comparative Education Review* (1970). Mercurio's work was published more fully as *Caning, Educational Rite and Tradition* (1972).

Outside the Journal a number of volumes were published such as Calvert's *Role of the Pupil* (1975), which, like the work of Biddle, Adams, Fraser et al., (1970) coincided with a collapse of interest in role theory as a productive perspective in the sociology of education. Somerset's *Littledene Revisited* (1974) was republished as a genuflection towards the past and simply reinforced the point that little of equal value was contemporarily available. Robinson and O'Rourke (1974) usefully pulled together a collection of source documents and were roundly castigated for contributing so little to the development of a sociological theory of New Zealand education (Braithwaite, 1974).

Clearly, by the mid-seventies some sociologists were looking for a sustained sociological analysis of New Zealand education, the time was ripe. The only problem was, who was to do it? Ramsay (1975) made a beginning. His volume, which was initially intended as a sociology of New Zealand education, foundered on the same rocks as Robinson and O'Rourke in that it eventually became a collection of individualised studies. Nonetheless, it was much more original than anything previously produced and fairly represented most of what was available in New Zealand in mid-decade. In keeping with the sociology of education in New Zealand at that time, the book was a somewhat myopic volume struggling to escape its entrapment in the form of institutional sociology mapped out previously by Musgrave (1965), a decade before. It concentrated on three related institutions; family, school and class. In hindsight, it seems curious that there was so little reflection of the impact of Young's *Knowledge and Control*, published four years earlier and, at that time, creating a storm of controversy in English sociology of education, nor of the revisionary materials emerging from the Open University. Indeed, the Introduction to this sociology of New Zealand education was hardly sociological at all, relying more on the work of Peters, O'Connor, Dearden and White, than on Bernstein, Bourdieu, Young, Whitty, Esland, Ahier, and the emerging proponents of the New Sociology of Education. In this respect, it is an accurate reflection of the state of New Zealand sociology of education in the middle of the seventies. Ramsay's book has been used for the second half of the decade as a text in most Schools of Education. It

is the best we have. Unfortunately, it presents little intellectual challenge in thinking about education, and sits uncomfortably beside such texts as Young (1971), Bowles and Gintis (1976), Bernstein (1975), and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), which are now creeping into advanced courses.

Part of the problem is of course that an adequate sociology of New Zealand education needs to be based upon a wider literature - both analytic and research based - than is currently available.

Why the Dearth of Research and Analysis?

If the frequency and content of publication and review leads us to believe that interest in, and debate over issues in the sociology of education is at a fairly low level, we are entitled to ask what those two dozen or so sociologists have been doing for the past decade. There are several answers to this question. Firstly, they have been teaching. The small numbers of sociologists in universities has meant that very few individuals have been carrying responsibility for unreasonably large numbers of students. Over the span of a decade, Braithwaite, Ramsay, Barrington and Calvert have been carrying almost sole responsibility for teaching courses, from Introductory to Advanced, in their respective institutions. Canterbury has until recently lacked a convincing program in the sociology of education, Massey alone has had a number of sociologists (on and off), but the variety of courses offered and the heavy and increasing demands of off campus teaching have prevented a great deal of attention being paid to research and publication. Secondly, and cynically, several of the sociologists have been preoccupied with the need to complete their own Ph.Ds. There is an apparent paradox here, for it could reasonably be expected that such research oriented activity would produce a substantial body of useful literature. That it has not done so is in part due to the absence of senior academics familiar with the contemporary revolutions in sociological thought occurring in Europe and North America, and also to the absence of any real argument over the implications of these debates for the New Zealand situation.

In my mind, it is this lack of theoretical debate, the curious (and unnecessary) isolation of New Zealand from an extensive and public debate in Europe and the United States, which is the primary cause of the weakness of sociology of education in New Zealand. This debate is complex and extensive and its subtle ramifications could probably not be examined in toto in New Zealand. However, the questions being raised about education as a

means of social control (Young), of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu), of capitalist hegemony (Bowles and Gintis), of technical production (Apple) are major social as well as educational issues, which speak directly to the current condition of New Zealand. The ways in which such questions penetrate into educational systems, schools and classrooms, are important in New Zealand as elsewhere. They demand researchers' attention. Until such attention is given to the theoretical structure of the issues and problems, then little meaningful research is possible.

There has, of course, been some research which has not seen the light of day. In 1969/1970, Bates and Adams undertook, in co-operation with a number of students throughout New Zealand, a study of teacher role on a matched, though haphazard, sample of pupils, parents and teachers. Unfortunately for the chief researchers, the data collection was inconsistent, the problems of training and control over distance too great, and the computer capacity available at that time too small to accommodate the analyses required. A number of small studies resulted from a project in the form of M.A. and Diploma in Education theses (see Pickens, 1975, 1976a, 1976b), but the grand design of the project withered. The fate of the Role Set Project is instructive in that the scale of research which was demanded by the researchers, was not adequately supported in terms of either personnel, finance or facilities. Research on anything other than a small scale seems difficult to mount in New Zealand. Similar, thought not insoluble problems seem to beset the School Effects Project, also based at Massey.

The problem lies less in the accumulation of data than in the sustained attention needed to provide adequate analysis. This is a continuing story in New Zealand research. For instance, data banks are available for Watson's cohort analysis of 1958 teacher training entrants. Little analysis has been undertaken. Similarly, the Role Set data are still available. The data resulting from the 1970 IEA study are available on tape to researchers, as is the huge mass of data resulting from the department's Baseline Survey. As any of the custodians of these materials will admit, their existence is as much of an embarrassment as an achievement, for there is in practical terms no-one available to work on them.

This situation is the result of several interacting factors. Firstly, there is the previously noted preoccupation of academics with teaching. Secondly, partly as a result of the lack of research (or theoretical) traditions in the sociology of education, there is only a tiny number of M.A. and Ph.D students currently receiving training. Thirdly, there is no adequate career path for research graduates either in universities or in the Department of Education (which unlike the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research is apparently unable to appoint research graduates on any scale other than clerical, unless they are members of the Inspectorate). Compared, say, with the situation for psychologists, neither opportunity nor incentive exists for talented undergraduates to undertake graduate studies in the sociology of education. Fourthly, and perhaps most disappointing, there is the failure of organisations such as the New Zealand Council for Educational Research to develop a sufficient sociological imagination to sponsor or conduct studies comparable, for instance, with Halsey's study of education, occupation and mobility, or to develop a tradition flowing from, for instance, Leicester Webb's *Control of Education in New Zealand* (1937).

## New Directions

There are growing indications, however, of interest in a new range of problems articulated by the new sociology of education. Clark (1979) has, for instance, produced one of the most coherent analyses of Young's work yet available. Bates (1978) has attempted to outline some of the major issues involved and indicate how they might be tackled in New Zealand (1979). Wilson (1979) has begun an analysis of the relation between a segmented workforce and a segmenting education system. Shuker (1979) has begun a re-interpretation of New Zealand's educational history in the light of emerging sociological issues. Freeman-Moir (1979) and Davies and Freeman-Moir (1979) have begun an analysis of New Zealand education from a perspective of a radical, political economy. This is all very encouraging from a theoretical point of view and may well presage a new era in the sociology of education in New Zealand.

## So What About Research?

Asking the right (or simply interesting) questions does not of itself produce research results which might substantiate or deny hypothesised conclusions. Certainly, much of the radical critique of education contained in the new

wave exponents approach is a matter of re-interpretation of data and relations from an alternative ideological point of view. In this sense, much publicly available data can form a basis for research activity. There is, however, a limit to what can be achieved using conventional resources. Much of the analysis required by the new sociology cannot be conducted on the basis simply of official statistics (and even if it might, the Department of Education's discontinuing of the educational statistics volumes would make this difficult).

What is needed is research of a different kind that will fill out and illuminate the quantitative analysis which provides the framework for explanation and discussion. We could do with work of an ethnographic and phenomenological kind, such as that provided in the work of Paul Willis (1977), and being developed in the United States by, for instance, Lou Smith (1979). We could also do with some attempt to relate such accounts to macro-structures within the wider society, although preferably more sophisticated than that provided by Sharp and Green (1975). Such attempts would need to embrace an alternative definition of class, for instance, seeing it as a set of relations rather than simply as a categorisation of individuals' aggregated statistically on the basis of income, education and prestige. Again, the relationship between institutions of school and work needs examination, not simply in terms of the vocational aspirations of adolescents, but also as an account of *how* these aspirations are formed, and confirmed or confronted within the context of local cultures which give meaning to such aspirations. Yet again, the impact of technological innovation on the structure and meaning of work as a dual labour market develops under the pressure of deskilling has profound implications for the functions of education, and demands sociological analyses of the confrontation and articulation of ideologies in the political context of educational administration.

There are individuals in New Zealand interested in each of these areas. Mostly they are young scholars, mostly they are in universities, mostly they are concerned with the development of a critical social theory concerned with educational processes as part of the general processes of cultural reproduction in the context of political economy.

Problems and Possibilities

The critical nature of the theory being developed by younger academics, and the revisionist historical perspectives associated with it, are in the best traditions of independent intellectual and academic thought. They ask fundamental questions about a number of long-held and cherished beliefs about education, equality and justice. The search for more adequate answers to what now appear to be problems and solutions too easily taken for granted in the past, offers exciting challenges of an intellectual, moral and political kind.

However, it seems likely that the research needed to sustain and validate the new hypotheses is going to be difficult to do in New Zealand. Firstly, the universities have very limited funds available for educational research. Secondly, the lack of sufficient numbers of researchers makes the burden on individuals very heavy. Thirdly, the refusal of the University Grants Council Research Committee to fund personnel rather than equipment makes social science research difficult to fund from that source. Fourthly, the heavy teaching demands on sociologists of education prevent any sustained involvement in research.

My own judgement is that the universities are, nonetheless, the only places in which such research is likely to be done. This is because of several factors. Firstly, the theory on which significant new developments in research is likely to be based is a *critical* social theory. This makes it difficult for the Department of Education or the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (both of whom are politically vulnerable institutions) to sponsor, let alone conduct such research. Secondly, universities may be short of appropriate staff and students, but they nonetheless have virtually a monopoly on what talent there is. Moreover, personnel in universities can be sustained intellectually by an international community less susceptible to local pressures.

There are, of course, a number of researchers more interested in descriptive research related to issues identified as problematic by official sources. The perennial issue is, of course, that of Maori education. Because research into Maori education has been for so long a politically necessary involvement for government, department, the New Zealand Council for Educational Research and universities alike, the bulk of 'sociological' research has been confined to studies of Maori, or more often Maori/European comparisons. Much of such research has been claimed as sociological on the basis that race is a sociological category. The preoccupation of researchers with research into Maori issues has,

however, been a prime cause of the failure to attend to fundamental issues of class, class formation, and educational and occupational segmentation and cultural reproduction in New Zealand society as a whole.

That is not to say that research into such issues in the sociology of education is unnecessary, only that an undue emphasis may well prevent the emergence of research of a more fundamental kind which would allow a sense of balance and a perspective within which ethnic issues can be understood as they are affected by other social, economic, cultural and educational processes. Wilson (1979) indicates precisely the ways in which the correspondence between Maori education and employment might be better appreciated within the context of a 'better understanding of the development of the capitalist production process' (1979: 24). His comment on previous researches which 'as a general rule... report in meticulous detail the passing of important events (but) leave out any comprehensive explanation of the social and economic forces which influence them' is a fair characterisation of the traditions of sociology in education in New Zealand. Moreover, his call for 'an expanded qualitative understanding' within the general structural framework of quantitative research should also be heeded.

Maybe we can take some small hope from a number of projects currently on the drawing boards. The first is a study of schools with special needs proposed by Waikato which involves both attempts at qualitative and quantitative analysis, and an attempt to situate the research within a structural study of transitional urban communities. The second is a study of school climate proposed by Massey, which attempts an integration of analyses of classroom, school and community, based on ideas of the importance of schooling as a focus for cultural reproduction in a provincial community. Third, at Canterbury John Freeman-Moir is about to embark upon an ethnographic study of the school/work transition, patterned to some extent on Willis's example. Fourth, Viviane Robinson at Auckland has begun a small scale study of the impact of vocational guidance procedures on clients. Fifthly, Roy Nash at Massey is developing a sociological account of the development and struggle over rural education in New Zealand. At Waikato, Battersby and Ramsay continue their studies of teacher education and socialisation.

Two things, however, are crucial to the success of these projects. Firstly, commitment on the part of the universities concerned to the provision of resources to sustain the research teams involved both in terms of the retention of key researchers through promotion and a reduction of teaching duties, and in terms of giving priority to the development of graduate research facilities in these areas, and secondly, commitment on the part of the funding agencies of sufficient funds to sustain the research effort over more than a brief time span. Neither of these commitments is easy to achieve. These are essential, however, if the sociology of education is to be allowed to make anything like its potential contribution to the analysis of education and society in New Zealand.

Future Prospects

Though I have argued that the tradition of sociology of education in New Zealand is undeveloped, that the community of scholars is scattered and divided, that too little effort has gone into the development of graduate research or occupational opportunities, that even the strongest groups of scholars in universities are unstable and poorly supported, I nonetheless believe that there is sufficient talent in the younger generation of scholars in New Zealand for a significant contribution to be made to the development of a sociology of New Zealand education. What is needed is a commitment on the part of universities to sponsor and promote this talent in order to retain it; a commitment on the part of sociologists to talk and, if possible, work with each other to develop a community of scholarship; a degree of political insulation to allow the development of a critical social theory, which will speak directly, though possibly controversially, to current issues, and a sufficient and continuous basis of financial support to allow more than brief attention to be paid to pressing problems. I believe these things are achievable even within the current context of New Zealand society. I believe that without them, certain crucial perspectives, analyses and documentations will be absent from a growing social, political and ideological debate over the function of education in a capitalist state during a major crisis. New Zealand would be the poorer for such an absence.

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